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# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Jeroen Poblome, Daniele Malfitana, John Lund (ed.), *HEROM. Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture*, vol. 1. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012. Pp. 275. ISBN Online ISSN: 2294-4281; Print ISSN: 2294-4273. €30,00.**

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[The authors and titles are listed below.]

‘Scherben bringen Glück’ is the title of the wry editorial statement for this maiden volume of *HEROM*, and not without reason as this signifies the break with its predecessor, *FACTA: A Journal of Roman Material Culture Studies*. Financial constraints forced the editors to seek a new publishing house, yet they turned necessity into opportunity to “make a good product even better” with three major changes. In the first place, the Hellenistic world is now included, encouraging more cross-chronological dialogue regarding the material culture of the post-classical world. In the second place, the format is principally digital, allowing for the publication of larger data sets as well as full-colour images, but at the cost of the quality of the print version. Thirdly, and most important, the journal is now positioned within a much broader academic scope, engaging with wider issues of social relevance from a theorizing standpoint.

These aims are not immediately apparent in all of the contributions, however, and the first, non-thematic article, John Richard Green’s study on Roman bronze lamps, would have been more at home in *FACTA*. Green’s lamps bear depictions of Dionysiac masks and he relates them to the growing popularity of pantomime in Roman theaters, touching on their social contexts, although this could be explored in more depth. His catalogue of 93 specimens provides a rare overview of the material with 26 photos; the quality of these could be better (no. 25 is blurred). Furthermore, a map of their distribution would support Green’s argument for their late introduction into Greece and the Ionian coast. Nonetheless, his sound iconographic approach make this a worthwhile contribution, despite being the odd man out in this issue.

The rest of the volume is taken up by the main theme of Roman and early Christian pilgrimage, introduced by guest editor Troels Myrup Kristensen, director of the project ‘The Emergence of Sacred Travel: Experience, economy, and connectivity in Ancient Mediterranean Pilgrimage’ at Aarhus University.<sup>1</sup> While the title of this

project reflects current debates over the terms ‘pilgrimage’ and ‘sacred travel’ in antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Kristensen stresses that the real importance lies in a long term perspective of the phenomenon, in which continuity and change may be more readily discerned. The lens of material culture is crucial in this regard, with artifacts at all scales, from mobile pilgrim flasks and votives, to constructed space at places of pilgrimage, and even the manipulation of landscape to stage the pilgrimage experience, e.g. the wondrous visual approach to the shrine of Aya Tekla, near modern Silifke in southeast Turkey. Experience, economy, and connectivity are the main avenues of enquiry of the Danish project and are clearly reflected in the six contributions here.

The first of these is Philip Kiernan’s study on places of pilgrimage during the transition from pagan to Christian practices in the Roman west, a refreshing geographical focus. He examines four sites: two sanctuaries of Apollo, one at Nettleton (UK), and another at Hochscheid (Germany); a spring shrine to the nymph Sequana at Fontes Sequanae (France); and the complex at Thun-Allmendingen (Switzerland), dedicated to a number of Roman and local deities. Kiernan has a welcome holistic approach, as he integrates epigraphic and iconographical data, including representations of pilgrims themselves at Fontes Sequanae, with architecture, landscape and location. Common to all four case studies is their isolation, which would be instrumental in creating a ‘shared social identity’<sup>3</sup> but may also be related to their role as healing sanctuaries, as he observes. The transition towards Christianity was remarkably smooth, and a case in point for the Danish project’s *longue durée* approach to the topic.

Kristensen frames his discussion of textiles and tattoos within the transformation which an individual sought through pilgrimage. ‘Souvenirs’ from the sacred journey, which could also include ephemeral items such as holy water, should be viewed as enduring symbols of this personal transformation, part of the pilgrim’s new ‘social skin’.<sup>4</sup> Against this background, Kristensen discusses the problematic issue of textiles and tattoos as material culture from Christian pilgrimages in Egypt, interpreting the use of illustrative textiles as a continuation of Greco-Roman ideals regarding sacred clothing, while tattoos on the other hand represent a conscious inversion of social values, associated as they were with human bondage. Although the evidence is ruefully scant, he manages to draw this phenomenon in from the margins of research and include it within the wider perspective of pilgrimage and its material culture.

A specific class of pilgrim artifacts is found in the collections of metal ampullae discovered at Monza and Bibbio in Northern Italy. With their stamped depictions from the life of Christ, these have largely been studied from an iconographical perspective. Heather Hunter-Crawley, however, argues that in order to fully interpret them, one should focus on what they do, rather than what they signify. This is where sensory archaeology and the theory of affordance come in.<sup>5</sup> Hunter-Crawley’s provocative interpretation is compelling, although she does go into considerable detail denouncing previous theoretical approaches as Cartesian dualistic, while her redefinition of ‘cultural phenomenology’ could be more developed. Nonetheless, her synthetic approach shows how these objects, and the mimesis of experience which they evoked, created a window to the Holy Land and gave an immediate sense of ‘being there’ to their beholder, whether pilgrim or later bystander.

Given its strategic location and the extent of its Christian structures in late antiquity, it is difficult to imagine that the ancient sanctuary of Zeus at Labraunda was not of the target of pilgrimage, or rather sacred movement, as Jesper Blid argues. Blid guides the reader through time as he carefully discusses the changes to the site, with excellent illustrations. <sup>6</sup> Labraunda was a major religious center, promoted in the Late Classical period by the Hekatomnids, satraps of Karia, who connected the mountain shrine to the more populated areas to the north (Alinda) and south (Mylasa) by means of a paved road. It is this sacred way which continued to be vital to the site roughly a millennium later, as the shrine alternatively became a roadside emporium and a Christian complex in the fifth and sixth centuries. Blid observes that the churches were built below the temenos and very near the road, using extant architecture but practically obscuring the ancient shrine from view with “a ‘curtain’ of Christian churches” (p.171).

Churches were more physically intertwined with antiquities in southern Greece, as Amelia Robertson Brown observes. Despite the biblical fame of Patras, Athens and Corinth, this area was not a popular destination before the nineteenth century, as few relics were left and the area was too unstable. Travel accounts such as that of the Englishman Saewulf, who in 1102 visited Patras and Corinth, and perhaps Athens, en route to the Holy Land, are therefore precious. Brown interprets such texts together with the archaeological material in order to comprehend the effort made by locals to attract pilgrims. Stories were spun and antiquities were layered with new Christian identities, e.g. the Parthenon was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, while memories of St. Paul were perpetuated through legend and architecture. At Corinth, local martyrs were given superregional status, and great basilicas were erected in places where they would be noticed by land and by sea. Pilgrimage could be lucrative, if only the pilgrims would come.

Ephesus, on the other hand, has long been a *locus sanctus*, but which monuments can actually be linked with pilgrimage in the Byzantine era is Andreas Pülz’ essential question. The basilica-tomb of St. John is a prime example, testified by both literary and material evidence as a place of pilgrimage. Legend has it that the saint, protector of the city after driving Artemis away, did not die but simply ‘fell asleep’, hence the regular puffs of dust emanating from the vents below his altar. Pülz reconstructs a veritable ‘dust industry’ of supply and demand with this ‘manna’, believed to have healing powers, collected in ampoules which are found across the Mediterranean and Black Sea areas; interestingly, St. John is depicted on only a few of them. Other sites at Ephesus, such as the so-called St. Luke’s Tomb, lack material evidence of pilgrimage although there may be literary testimonies, as with the Cave of the Seven Sleepers. Sites connected to Mary, including the popular House of Mary (Meryemana), did not attract pilgrims until the nineteenth century and were connected to the Greek community at Şirince.

Ann Marie Yasin wraps up this issue with an excellent response, in which she stresses the intrinsic nature of objects to religion. Yasin poignantly illustrates this by way of modern analogy with sacred tourists at the Ephesian Meryemana, their intimate interactions with wayside images of Maria en route to the site, the objects of ritual devotion, and the replicas back in the United States. This reflects three recurring themes which she discerns in this volume: that of the bodily experience of the pilgrim; the interconnectedness of sacred topographies, both between major places and at the intra-urban scale; and the economic context of the sites and the

objects. As Yasin observes, although we need to qualify what we mean by 'pilgrimage', we must not lose sight of the overall aim to understand what it was that drove the desire for divine intervention, motivated multitudes to actions well beyond the sphere of their daily lives, and forever transformed the world, "the effects of which are still very much with us today" (p.274).

This volume certainly suits well with the ambitions of *HEROM*, offering a wide perspective on the things, places, and connections that allowed pilgrimage to happen. Although some contributions are more steeped in theory than others, they all leave one with insights into sacred travel, but also wondering about the motives of the sacred traveler. According to the editors, "this journal wishes to focus even more on that one issue that matters most in archaeological terms: people" (p.18). They are well aware that there is a long path ahead of them. *HEROM* 1 is a good step in the right direction.

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## Notes:

1. See [The Emergence of Sacred Travel](#).
2. E.g. Matthew Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*, London, 1997; Jas Elsner and Ian Rutherford, *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity. Seeing the Gods*, Oxford, 2005.
3. Victor Turner, "Pilgrimages as Social Processes," in V. Turner (ed.) *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca, NY, 1974, 166-230.
4. Terence Turner, "The Social Skin," in C.B. Burroughs and J.D. Ehrenreich (eds) *Reading the Social Body*, Iowa City, 1993, 15-39.
5. Hunter-Crawley draws on Carl Knappett, *Thinking through Material Culture. An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Philadelphia, 2005. The concept was developed by James J. Gibson in "The theory of affordances," published in R. Shaw and J.

Bransford (eds) *Perceiving, acting, and knowing. Toward an ecological psychology*, Hillsdale, NJ, 1977, 67-82.

6. Note: Fig. 7 is the well-house on the central terrace, rather than the tetraconch.

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